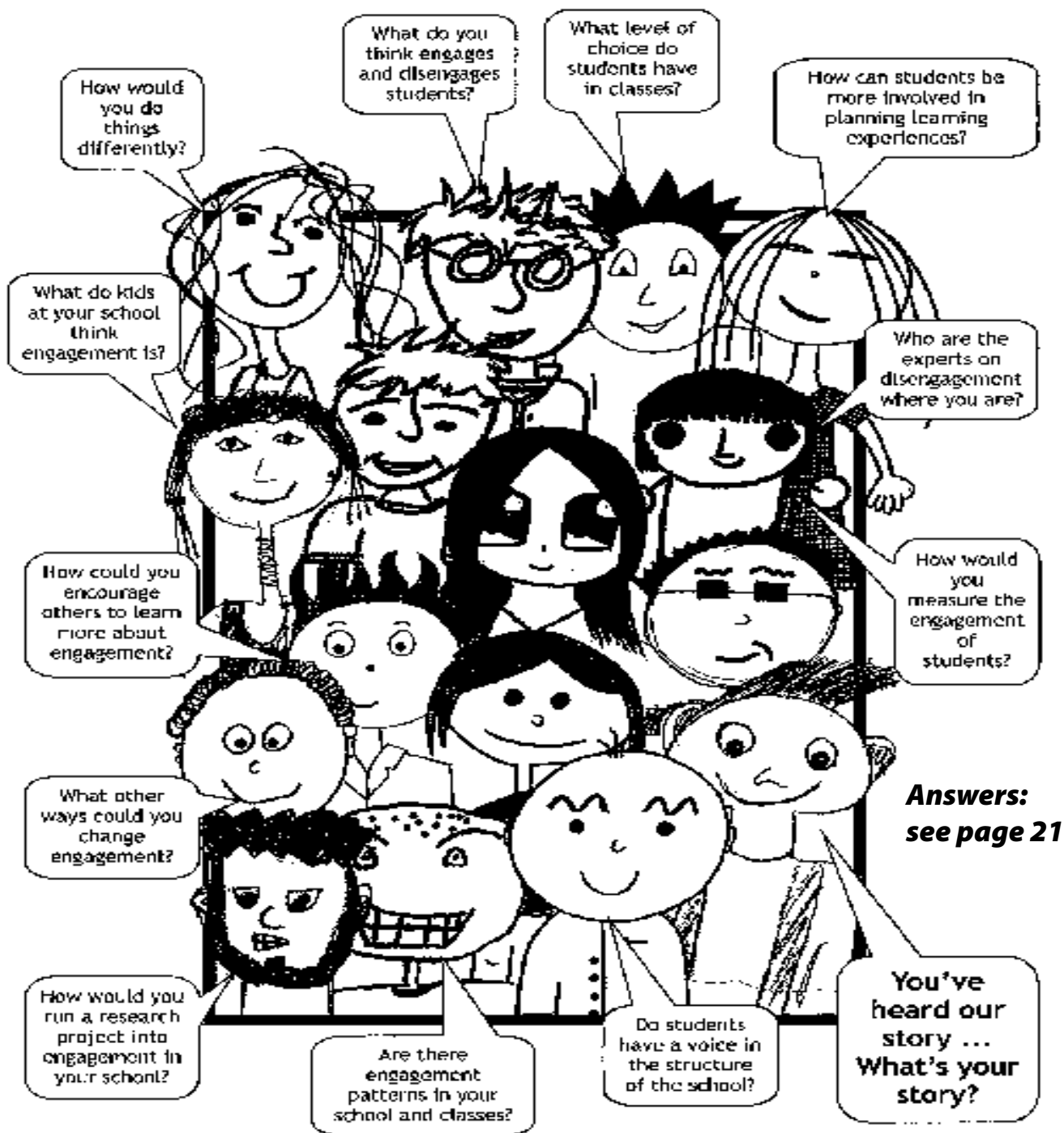


Connect

supporting student participation

Number 181
February 2010

ABN: 98 174 663 341



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- **Student Councils: What Could They Do?**
- **Making Informed Food Choices at School: A Student Investigation**
- **Exploring Cyber Culture: Working in Partnership with Year 9 Students**
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The challenge that closes 'Switched On to Learning'
- how will you respond? Read the book and find out!

Why does *Connect* exist?

Connect has been
published bi-monthly since 1979.

It aims to:

- document student participation approaches and initiatives;
- support reflective practices;
- develop and share resources.

Connect:

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This Issue:

In the hubbub of getting to 30 years of publication of *Connect* with last issue, perhaps we understated the importance of the latest publication available through *Connect* - so let's do a little more justice to it here.



At the end of November and the start of December 2009, the Student Action Teams at Pender's Grove and Preston South Primary Schools in Melbourne's northern suburbs, completed their three-year investigation and action on *student engagement with schools*. This project was funded and supported by The CASS Foundation. The book that the teams produced reports on their project, but also serves to sum up their learning – and present it as a resource to be used by other students and teachers.

The book is broken into four chapters. In Chapter 1, the students, led by their character **Mary**, introduce what engagement means, how it can be 'measured' and why it is important. **Idya** takes over in Chapter 2 to explain some of the factors that affect student engagement, both at school and at home. She asks: "Which of these factors can we affect?" **SATman**, in Chapter 3, picks up that challenge by sharing the students' ideas and suggestions on what schools could and should be *doing* to improve student engagement. Finally, **Fred** appears in Chapter 4 to tell the story of what the two teams did, and to show how the Student Action Team approach was, itself, engaging - and gives lots of great and practical ideas along the way.

The book is presented in cartoon format: a cartoon book written for teachers by Grade 4, 5 and 6 students. Limited numbers of copies are available through *Connect* (see the order form on **pages 21 and 22** in this issue).

To launch this book, the students took part in two events. Late in November, they visited their local State Member of Parliament, and also the city offices of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. They presented copies of their book and talked about the process and some of the content. "Read it!" was the message. A week later, some of the students also presented copies of the book and their description of the journey to a small conference of teachers who were discussing school engagement.

It was thrilling to have the Member of Parliament later stand up in the House and report on the visit, the book and the project and congratulate the students.

Thanks and congratulations to The CASS Foundation (including its Project Manager Lyndall Jones), to the teachers (Jeff Jackson, Michelle Smith in 2007 and Sam Ross in 2008-9) and to the Principals of the schools (Thérèse West, Glendy Jakober and Mary McGregor).

Roger Holdsworth

NEXT ISSUE: #182: April 2010
Deadline for material: end of March, 2010

Reviewing Opportunities for Student Voice and Leadership

There are abundant opportunities for students to grow academically and socially at our school – Brentwood Secondary College in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. Students are encouraged to participate in leadership roles through Student Action Teams (SRC, Green Team and V-Gen) and co-curricular activities, and develop partnerships with the wider community through the Duke of Edinburgh and World Challenge Programs.

I started working at Brentwood in 2008 and shortly after my appointment I expressed an interest in helping the Wellbeing Co-ordinator with the Student Representative Council (SRC). For the last two years I have been working collaboratively with her on many SRC projects. She has been my mentor and inspiration. Through working with her, I have particularly gained a better understanding of school protocols.

In 2009, one of the Assistant Principals acknowledged my passion in **student voice and leadership**. He asked me to address the issue of student leadership within the school and make student leadership more meaningful. Previously, students wore a badge, but did not necessarily do anything to deserve it.

Leadership Audits

In Term 1, I conducted a **leadership audit**. I asked staff to give me a description of each leadership role that existed in the school, and a list of students who were in these current leadership positions. The research showed that successful leadership applicants occupied more than one role and were generally academic students. This reinforced the idea that the current leadership system did not reflect the **diversity** of the students and their needs. The expectations of students were also unclear and were not well documented.

In order to improve this student leadership situation at Brentwood, I felt I needed to complete another form of audit. In this, I investigated leadership programs at both secondary schools around Victoria and the wider community. This provided me with the opportunity to observe effective student leadership programs and made me realise that an effective leadership structure needed regular training and support. Furthermore, student leadership needed to be imbedded into the curriculum.

With this in mind, the Assistant Principal and I decided that we needed to increase students' awareness of leadership in the younger year levels; in particular we wanted to target Year 7. Therefore, in 2010, the Year 7 program will adopt a more explicit leadership approach.

Documenting Leadership

We also realised that we needed to publicly document and acknowledge the student leadership and participation opportunities that were already available in the school. We established a group of eight students from Years 11 and 12. They consisted of the School Captains and the Year 11 Year Level Captains. These students were invited to a luncheon and were encouraged to make a difference to Brentwood through developing a **Student Leadership and Participation Booklet**. I really wanted the group to have ownership and share the responsibility for the project with me.

YEAR LEVELS: Years 7 - 12	
POSITION DESCRIPTION: Year Level Captains consist of 1 male and 1 female from each Year Level. They focus on student issues and build a sense of community within their Year Level.	
Expectations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen to ideas and suggestions of students in your Year Level 2. Organise, manage and conduct Year Level functions, events and camps 3. To lead and encourage other students in areas of student leadership and Co-Curricula activities. 4. Actively participate in the Brentwood Executive 5. Attend leadership training 6. Follow school rules by example and encourage others 7. Assist the Student Managers in running Year Level assemblies 8. Work closely with Student Managers to ensure important information is passed onto to the rest of your Year Level 9. To undertake any tasks for the Year Level as requested by the Student Managers 10. To work with the Year 12 Ambassadors to promote and organise a team of students to assist/represent Year Level and whole school events 	
TIME COMMITMENT: Meetings as required, and use of lunchtimes etc. to plan, organise and execute plans	
SKILLS REQUIRED: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be passionate about making a positive contribution to the school and wider community 2. Have the support of students in your Year Level 3. Be able to work individually and in a team 4. Be able to speak individually at assemblies/group events 5. Be able to communicate to students of different year levels and staff 6. Willingness to lead by example by following school rules and values 7. Show initiative 8. Good Academic Record 	
HOW TO APPLY: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask your Student Manager for a written application 2. Fill out the application 3. If successful, you will be short listed and interviewed by your Year Level Student Manager 	

YEAR LEVEL CAPTAIN

The group met once a week to voice their opinions on leadership and reflect on their roles. They spoke to both teachers and staff to gain a better understanding of the situation. As a group, we delegated the leadership roles. We modified the Darebin Reservoir's Leadership Booklet template (see **Connect** 154-155, Aug-Oct 2005) and, as a group, made decisions on the layout of the booklet.

Throughout the process, the group of eight students were supported and encouraged not only by staff, but also by the 2008 School Captain, who was both an inspiration and a valuable resource in her knowledge and experience as a leader. In addition, the students could relate to her. She provided them with a student's perspective, while helping me gain a better understanding of structures and processes.

Alternative Structures

This led us to the decision to look at the current leadership structure and brainstorm possible alternatives. After long discussions, we decided to refine the leadership structure by giving Year Level Captains more responsibility. It was clear that students wanted greater ownership and the opportunity to create student led projects. They also felt that they needed support, training and funding.

Taking this into consideration, we formed the **Brentwood Executive**, which consists of both School Captains, the Year Level Captains and two delegates from the Student

Action Groups (SRC, Green Team and V-Generation). The Year Level Captains would be mentored by senior students, while also supported at Year Level events by one of the Year 12 Ambassadors.

We based our decision on the need for students to feel connected to the school community and develop relationships across year levels while creating a positive change. We also wanted to focus on improving the relationship between staff and students through mutual respect and experiences.

Our last step in the process involved careful planning of how we were going to implement the proposed structure. This was essential. We needed to show that we were both serious and committed to making a change. I developed a set of questions that needed to be addressed. As a team, we shared the leadership and delegated the tasks. Despite the Year 11 Year Level Captains finishing school, they came to help in their own time.

Their enthusiasm and commitment amazed me. They each brought their own strengths and skills to the project and, as a result, showed excellent teamwork by complementing each others' strengths and skills.

In 2010, I have the pleasure to work with these students again. They have been selected as the 2010 School Captains. I am looking forward and committed to supporting their

journey as leaders and providing them with the necessary skills to reach their full potential.

Training

After six months of researching leadership programs within Victoria and on the internet, I have also developed a series of leadership training workshops.

This year, the expectations of the Year Level Captains will be higher. They will be required to reflect on their role as a Year Level Captain through a leadership journal. They will learn skills such as developing a community, group dynamics, communication skills, thinking skills and project management. They will also learn accountability through shared leadership.

This year won't be easy. Year Level Captains will find it challenging and rewarding, but they will learn and foster life-long skills that will be valuable for the duration of their schooling and future career prospects.

Our 2010 Student Leadership structure is only the beginning. It is the beginning of appreciating young people and unleashing their potential as leaders. It will be a learning curve for all of us, which will involve evaluation and monitoring from both staff and students. It will be about the journey and what we experience along the way. This year is about making a change. The end result doesn't matter...

Raquel Woods

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Introducing the Green Team

I began my teaching career at Brentwood Secondary College in 2009. As a graduate teacher I came to Brentwood with little teaching experience but had all the enthusiasm in the world. The first term of my teaching life was a whirlwind of confusion. Not only was I trying to establish myself as a teacher, I had to learn literally hundreds of names and processes that I had never been exposed to before.

Before long I found my feet. I started to become more secure in the notion that I was doing a good job and was going to be alright. This is when I began to look at my surroundings and take note of the resources I was using. I was appalled to discover there was a server lack of sustainable practice in the Brentwood community.

I met with four interested students who had the same troubled thoughts as myself. These students were a fledgling group that needed someone to help them redirect the College's focus onto a more sustainable management of their resources. We started the Brentwood **Green Team** and began recruiting like-minded students to help us make positive changes within the school.

We have achieved a plethora of amazing projects over the last 12 months. We held a 'nude lunch' and an annual general meeting. Both of these events increased our profile in the school and showed the management team that we were a serious organisation that could achieve amazing things. We participated in 'Planet Ark Tree Day', where we planted 80 native trees around the school grounds with the help of the Year 7 cohort. We implemented a paper recycling system for the classrooms and participated in 'Earth Hour' for the second year running. Furthermore, we attended some networking conferences to expand our profile to the wider community.

For me, the most important way to achieve all these projects is to make them student centred. I decided to take the role of a facilitator and a 'guide beside'. I focused on teaching the kids appropriate leadership skills and fostering a sense of connectedness. I believe

this approach allowed students to be empowered and have a real sense of ownership over the projects they completed. Moreover, I found that the group of 30 students soon became a close knit family unit that not only worked on projects together but socialised after school hours.

For a teacher, taking a back seat and letting kids take risks and allowing them to make mistakes is extremely challenging. However, gradual student-centred learning that allows the students to have control over change within the school environment creates an opportunity for students to experience leadership, connectedness and real life learning.



We held elections within the **Green Team** for a President, Vice-President, Secretary, IT Team and Publicity Team. Initially, I thought this type of structure would allow all students the chance to execute projects that the majority of the group felt were important. However, in retrospect, I feel that this structure limited the number of leadership opportunities within the group. I conducted some research into how each member of the **Green Team** felt in regards to this structure and found that a few students felt that their time wasn't fully utilised and

that the senior members with the elected positions held all the power. Furthermore, I found that the majority of students continued to attend the weekly meeting because they felt connected and a sense of family. They build strong relationships and had the opportunity to use leadership skills to better their environment.

Today, the **Green Team** is a student-run organisation, 30 members strong. My role within this group is to facilitate and assist students to achieve their goals, whether it's a 'Nude Lunch' or a recycling system. I set myself up as a 'guide beside'. Students can achieve a sense of empowerment and connectedness by executing self-directed student run projects.

Thea Nicholas

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The Green Team

The Brentwood *Green Team* is a student run action group that aims to increase the environmental sustainability of Brentwood Secondary College and educate students about how their actions can affect the environment. The *Green Team* began in 2008, in a tiny box of a room, with only a small handful of students who recognised the need to do something ourselves about the state of the environment. Now we have regular meetings with over 30 members, and the *Green Team* has become a recognised name within the school.

The main idea of our team is to create awareness within our school community about the current environmental issues that our world faces, and to make Brentwood and more sustainable community.

In 2008 we participated in Planet Ark Tree Day where the students planted 80 native trees around the school. The Year 7 students also participated in biodiversity workshops, and at lunchtime we held an environmental fete for all to attend, which turned out to be a massive success. We implemented a paper recycling system for the classrooms, as well as running a 'nude lunch' in which students were encouraged to bring rubbish-free lunches to school, as well as participating in Earth Hour for the second year in a row.

At the start of 2009, the *Green Team* held an Annual General Meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together the Brentwood community to discuss a more sustainable future within the school. The afternoon included speakers from the Body Shop and Yarra Valley Water, creative presentations and speeches by members of the *Green Team*, and exciting giveaways. At the end of the meeting there was a discussion forum where teachers and parents were given the opportunity to ask questions and contribute their opinions, thoughts and ideas.

The Annual General Meeting helped open up communication channels between all facets of the Brentwood Secondary College society.

The projects we have planned for the near future include improving and extending our recycling system, participating in the Solar Schools Program, increasing the biodiversity of the school, and running a student forum where we can discuss with other environmental student groups how we can all work together to extend our influence into the wider community.



The *Green Team* is generally considered a successful and proactive student group. We are a sub-group of Brentwood's Student Representative Council, however many members of the team are not part of the SRC. The *Green Team* is for anyone and everyone who wishes to be part of the solution to the environmental crisis.

Our members come from a range of different year levels, and they all bring their own unique ideas and skills to the group. All of the *Green Team* members are eager, dedicated and willing to cooperate in order to make a difference, and it is this common spirit that drives our team to do what we do. Of course the team is not perfect; sometimes there are clashes in the decision-making processes between those who are all about action and want to get a thousand things done all at once, and those who are organised, meticulous planners. It is particularly hard to discuss everything that needs to be discussed in one 40-minute lunch break a week, and going to such a large school means that communication outside of meetings can sometimes be a challenge.

My advice to other student action groups would be to set long-term goals, and consider what needs to be done in advance. As the *Green Team*, we focus on a different area of environmental sustainability each term: waste and resource use, water, biodiversity and

energy. We have long-term goals in each of these areas, both for the year and the future, so on a short-term basis we can simply decide on a project that will lead us closer to achieving that goal, and then make a plan and execute it. This means less time is spent deciding what to do, and more is spent making a difference.

Communication is also one of the keys to success; everyone needs the right to speak, to be an active part of the team, and to be given leadership opportunities. It's amazing to watch people grow and transform when they have something to achieve that is just theirs – nobody gets to come to meetings and just sit there, and when they are taking



initiative, they will find they love it. So ensuring that lots of communication is happening between all team members ensures that everybody finds something they want to do and becomes a proactive contributor.

Ivern Ball once said, "Most of us can read the writing on the wall; we just assume it's addressed to someone else."

We aim to be the students who recognise that everyone has power to influence the current environmental crisis, and we, as students, have the capacity to work together to do something about it.

Melanie Brown
Year 11

Dulwich High School of Visual Arts and Design, NSW

Setting Up a Student Action Team

At Dulwich High School of Visual Arts and Design in Sydney, we are part of an inter-school project using Student Action Teams to explore and act on values-based issues that students are passionate about. A group of teachers took part in an introductory day late in 2009, and we are now ready to go in 2010.

It has been agreed to run the Student Action Team (SAT) as part of our curriculum. We currently run an interest elective of 75 minutes each week, so that is perfect.

We started last year by selecting 12 students from the current Year 8 and 9 students - half boys and half girls - based on recommendations from the Year Advisers. I put together a note describing the project and approached each student individually. Every single one accepted - and all were thrilled to bits. We selected the students based on them being bright but disengaged from their learning to some degree **and** we selected a few students who are engaged but need an opportunity like this to push them to the next level.

We then had a lunchtime meeting with the 12 students, together with the Principal and the three teachers. To give everyone a fuller explanation, I photocopied a few pages from the SAT manual. I had also sent a letter of congratulations home to their parents after the first time I spoke to the students. In response, I have even had an e-mail from one dad who was very happy with the program.

The students were really excited by the prospect of the excursion to meet the other students in the Region. Having that next get together already planned means they have a goal already. I have set up a draft plan of action, and this will, in its early stages, provide time for them to prepare for this meeting.



I also set up a distribution list in my email and sent an e-mail to the team members. For some of them, it is the first time they have ever looked at their school email account.

Already I can see the difference in those students around the school.

Wendy Herbert
Dulwich High School of Visual Arts & Design
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Get your SRC up and running in 2010!

Welcome back to a new school year. This is the time now to get your SRC up and running so it can be really effective. Remember that how you start off will determine how well you will work for the rest of the year. But if you delay, lots of things will start without student voices being heard!

Here are some simple steps that can help you get off to a great start. There will be lots more of these ideas in the VicSRC Student Resource Kit due later this year.

And **you** have some great ideas too. Share these at a VicSRC Regional Conference somewhere in Victoria in March-April-May!

Regional SRC Conferences 2010

Following the success of regional SRC conferences in 2008 and 2009, the VicSRC is holding another series across Victoria in 2010. We will be running conferences in Term 2 in each region of the state – so make sure you are there to be inspired, innovated and motivated to strengthen your Student Council. Join us at a Regional Conference and get your opinions heard.

Conference dates that have been confirmed are **below**. More will be confirmed shortly. If your school is interested to host a conference, please get in touch with the VicSRC urgently.

The conference program is mainly interactive, and has been designed with student participation as well as active learning outcomes in mind. These conferences are designed for SRC members and will enable students to identify issues of concern that they share - and develop plans around them; share information about what their SRC is doing and learn about other SRCs and their work; be challenged about making their SRC more effective; and link their interests to on-going action through the VicSRC - through local clusters and the Statewide SRC Congress later in the year.

Full details and registration forms will be sent to all schools later in Term 1.

Any further questions? Do not hesitate to contact us: 03 **9267 3744** during business hours, or email conferences@vicsrc.org.au

Regional SRC Conferences

Thursday, March 18th:	Bellarine Secondary College (Drysdale Campus)
Thursday, April 15th:	Caroline Chisholm Catholic College, Braybrook
Tuesday April 20th:	St Monica's College, Epping
Thursday April 22nd:	Wodonga Senior Secondary College
Tuesday April 27th:	Bentleigh Secondary College
Wednesday May 5th:	Frankston High School
Thursday May 6th:	Mt Clear College, Ballarat


The cost for VicSRC members is \$10 per student and \$15 per student for non members.

The VicSRC receives funding support from the **Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development** and is auspiced by and based at the **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)**. It can be reached there on 03 **9267 3744** or, for the cost of a local call from outside Melbourne on **1300 727 176**; or by email: vicsrc@yacvic.org.au

www.vicsrc.org.au


Is your SRC ready?

Here's a checklist of some of the steps your SRC should be taking NOW so that you are organised to be active partners in your school:

 **Week 1:** The new SRC Executive (or the Executive from last year) meets to plan the SRC's start - elections and first meetings.


 **Week 2:** Hold elections for all SRC positions (if that wasn't done last year).




 **Week 3:** First SRC meeting: establish purposes of the SRC; plan **three major objectives** for the year; allocate responsibilities within the SRC (eg portfolios).

 **Week 4:** Organise an **SRC Planning Conference** (have an overnight camp if possible; at least have an extended meeting). In your SRC Conference, run some 'getting to know you' and team building activities, set goals for the year, develop your SRC action plan and calendar, work out **how** you'll work, develop any training needed.



 **Advertise meetings:** Make sure that everyone knows about the first SRC meeting: use the school bulletin, noticeboards, the school website, e-mail lists etc.

 **Activity:** Organise your first public SRC activity so that all students know about the SRC and its work; involve other students to help run this activity.

Student Councils: what could they do?



Here are some examples of possible action by your Student Council or SRC. Are they all things that the SRC should or could be doing?

You could discuss this in an early SRC meeting. Break into small groups, and give each group one of the ideas. Work out someone in each group to read the paragraph and someone else to take notes on the discussion. Is this an appropriate topic for the SRC to be concerned about? Why? If so, how might your SRC do something similar? Then each group should report back to the whole meeting.

What does this tell us about the range of issues that SRCs could address?

Fundraising for a cause

An SRC makes a decision to 'adopt' a school student in Cambodia. To raise money, the SRC organises a sponsored event to take place during a lunchtime. The SRC chooses people to design a sponsorship form and posters for the school. Form representatives announce the event in their homerooms or year level assemblies. The SRC writes to the School Council and to local businesses requesting sponsorship and contacts the local newspaper, which does a story about the event. They raise enough money to pay the cost of the education of their adopted student for a year.

Appointment of a new senior teacher

A new senior teacher is to be appointed to the school. It has been agreed that the SRC will take part in the selection process. So, each applicant who is being interviewed for the job by the Principal and the School Council, is also asked to give a five-minute presentation to SRC representatives on why they want to teach at the school, and what they could offer. The SRC representatives then asked some questions (which the SRC members have agreed on before the interview) such as 'what do you see as the role of the SRC?' After the interviews, the SRC representatives discuss the candidates and give their comments to the Principal.

Improving the canteen food

When some students complain about the food in the canteen, the SRC decides to do something about it. A healthy foods subcommittee is set up and this group carries out a survey at lunchtime, asking students what they think of the food and how it could be improved. They meet the Canteen Manager to discuss the results. The Canteen Manager agrees to work with them to plan a new menu that will offer more of what people are asking for. The SRC organises a special lunch early the following term to publicise the new healthy menu. Students are encouraged to buy food from the canteen instead of bringing packed lunches, and the teachers are invited to join as well.

Improving the toilets

Following complaints from students – and from the cleaners – the SRC decides to take action to improve the toilets. They start by organising a student survey about students' concerns and about what facilities are needed in the toilets. The SRC is interested to find out what causes people to vandalise the toilets and when they think most of the damage occurs. They ask each form to discuss the problems and report back through their representative. Several forms suggest that the SRC representatives should monitor what happens in the toilets over a short time period, to gather more facts about the situation.

Campaign to clean up rubbish

The Principal says that the canteen will have to close if something is not done about the rubbish around it and around the yard generally. After discussing what is happening, the SRC asks the school to buy extra rubbish bins, and to also get a can recycling bin for the yard. But will students use these bins? So, the SRC also sets up an environment action subcommittee; this subcommittee works out a campaign to raise awareness of rubbish issues around the school. This includes inviting a theatre group to perform a play during a school day on environmental issues.



Based on and adapted from an exercise in the UK **Secondary School Councils Toolkit** (published by School Councils UK). Available from them at: www.schoolcouncils.org

Making Informed Food Choices at School

If we are serious about student wellbeing, we can't go past the issue of healthy eating in our schools. Last year, I worked with a Grade 5/6 class in my school to undertake some collaborative research about the promotion of healthier food choices.

Our school is a Catholic primary school situated in the City of Brimbank in the western suburbs of Melbourne. This is a low socio-economic area with a large number of refugees and new arrivals. There is a school tuck shop, with a variety of foods available, both healthy and unhealthy options. The tuck shop is open every day, both for lunch orders and for purchase of snacks at recess and lunchtime.

I am a 0.2 Art Teacher and also work with the Pastoral Care coordinator. The issue of healthy eating at this school came to my attention when I began supervising the eating time of one Prep class and one Grade 2 class each week. From my observations, it was clear that there are many children who do not have nutritionally sound lunches and snacks at school. In discussion with other teachers, I realised that many children have a lunch order from the tuck shop every day. This may not be an issue if the children were consuming the healthy options available from the tuck shop; however, these children were choosing options such as party pies, hotdogs or dim sims and the like. There were also many children bringing lunch from home, with questionable items such as cold chicken nuggets, cold fried rice, and Asian style sticky sweet buns with fried noodle

packets, chips or sweet biscuits as a snack. It made me wonder what these children were eating for breakfast – and were they even eating breakfast? This is an issue that hasn't been explored in depth at our school. What could we do to help families make more nutritionally sound food choices for the children to consume?

I began to wonder: if this were the trend in these two classes, would it more than likely be the case in the rest of the school?

When thinking about undertaking an action research project on this issue, my limited working hours and position within the school had to be taken into consideration. So when choosing my collaborative group, I decided that I would work with the 5/6 class who I have once a week and, with their teacher's blessing, we would work on the project together.

We started by having a discussion about healthy eating at our school. I wanted to gauge how these students felt about it, so that they would feel that they owned the project too. There was no point in them participating if they felt it was something they 'had' to do. Rather, if they could see my passion, I hoped that they would be passionate

too. It became clear to me that they were interested and concerned. As a group we decided to pose the question: *Will a healthy eating promotion encourage the children of our school to make healthier food choices for breakfast, snack and lunch?*

Planning the Research

Our plan was to collect data about this issue at our school, and then we would do a healthy eating promotion based on our findings. Our original goal was to have the data collection, collation and presentation done and our healthy eating promotion started during Term 3. However, by the end of Term 3, we had just completed presentations of data. Even though we were running behind, we knew that we couldn't skip any steps and we needed to give each step the time it deserved.

The students were placed into groups, each with a focus for their data collection: breakfast, snack, lunch or tuck shop eating habits. I briefed the class on different types of data collection methods and gave them ideas about how they could choose the best methods based on what it was that they wanted to find out.

It was the job of each group member to use the information given to contribute to creating a way of collecting data based on their area. I debated with myself about how I would react if a group came to me with their draft and I knew they wouldn't get the answers they needed. I decided that if this happened, I would let the children go and see what they worked



out. I decided that this would be more valuable learning.

Once each group worked out what they were going to do, I then got them to write a letter to each teacher to ask for permission to collect data about their grade. They needed to explain why we were doing it, and what we were going to do with the information. All teachers were very supportive and gave their permission for the students to collect data from their grades.

Next each group went about collecting their data.

Data Collection, Collation, Results and Discussion

Group 1 did a whole class verbal survey with the Prep students on *Do you eat breakfast before coming to school?*

In the second part of the verbal survey, the group showed pictorial examples of different types of breakfast examples and the Prep children had to move to a particular part of the room if they consumed that for breakfast. Here are some examples of the pictures they showed (opposite page).

Once the group collected all of their data they grouped the foods into different categories:

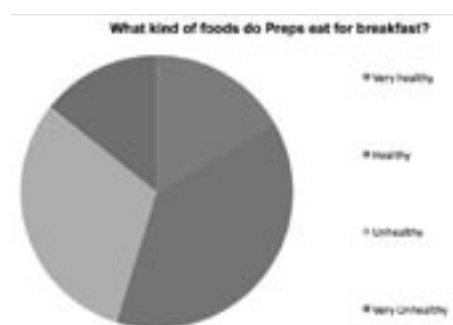
Very healthy: yoghurt, some cereals, milk or juice

Healthy: cornflakes, rice, sandwiches

Unhealthy: cereals that contain lots of sugar

Very unhealthy: chips, sweet cookies or milk with chocolate

They found that all Preps at our school eat breakfast before coming to school but the interesting part was what they actually ate. They worked out the number of children who consumed foods in the four different categories and presented their data in a pie graph:



It was evident to them that the majority of Preps at our school eat breakfast that is unhealthy according to the criteria.

This group also surveyed the staff about their lunchtime eating habits. They placed a letter in the staffroom along with their survey containing open-ended questions. They asked the staff to write down what they had for lunch the past three days. The students grouped the staff food choices into different categories using similar criteria. However, this time there was no need for the very unhealthy category. They found that the majority of staff consume either a healthy or very healthy lunch, mostly in the staffroom. Perhaps it would be an idea, they suggested, as a part of the health promotion, that the teachers eat their lunch in the classroom, to show the children a model of healthy eating.

This group chose to create a video explaining their results and will make these videos public via the school intranet.

Group 2 also did a verbal survey with the grade 1s. This group had some difficulties with their first survey in which the questions were:

1. *What do you eat for a snack?*
2. *Do you always have 'sometimes food' or 'all the time food' for a snack? (Show pictures of examples of 'sometimes foods' and 'all the time foods')*
3. *Do you buy chips at the tuckshop or fruits?*
4. *Do you like 'sometimes foods' more than 'all the time food' or do you like 'all the time food' more than 'sometimes food'?*

There are obvious flaws with this survey, however, as a learning experience I let them go ahead. It was very interesting to note that as soon as the survey was complete, Annie (all names have been changed) came to me and said: "We didn't get the results we needed because most of the children said they have all the options for question 1 and both for all the other questions." Of their own accord they had learned about issues of the appropriateness and accuracy of data.

So, with my guidance, we revamped the verbal survey to:

1. *What do you eat for a snack? (Open ended with no pictures)*
2. *If you have money to spend at the tuckshop, what do you usually buy?*
3. *How many times a week do you usually have a lunch order?*
4. *If you buy a lunch order, what do you usually get?*

This gave the group more of an opportunity to get the information they needed.

They got some interesting results. They found that the majority of students had a balance of healthy and unhealthy options for snack; many of the children had fruit in their snack as well as chips, biscuits or crackers. They also found that, out of the children who had money to spend at the tuckshop, most were spending their money on frozen icy poles (tubes).

In the initial stages of this research, I observed that there were many children who were having lunch orders every day. When this group conducted their research, their results contradicted my observations. They found that most of the children only have a lunch order one or two days a week. However, in line with what other groups had found, the majority of children were in fact choosing the unhealthy options in their lunch orders: party pies, hot dogs and high sodium fizzy drinks. This group also presented their findings on a video, available on the school intranet.

Group 3 also did a verbal survey of a sample of 20 grade 2s about their breakfast eating habits. Each child had a set of questions to ask:

1. *Do you eat breakfast before school?*
2. *Do you drink anything or eat anything besides breakfast?*
3. *What type of breakfast do you eat before school?*
4. *Do you eat anything else but breakfast?*
5. *Do you have a drink for breakfast?*

Again there are obvious flaws with these questions, however I let them go ahead with the interviews. When it came to collating the data, they realised that question 2, 4 and 5 were the same and could have been asked in one question.

This group found that 19 of the 20 children surveyed ate breakfast; however, again like group 1, the interesting part was the breakdown of what was actually consumed for breakfast. They found that, out of the 19 children who consume breakfast, 9 chose unhealthy options; again this was determined by foods that were very high in sugar or fat. The majority of children surveyed drank water, milk or juice with breakfast, however one child said that they usually drank Coke in the morning before school.

The children in this group have presented their findings on a graph and have displayed them in the classroom of the grade 2 children.

Group 4 created a questionnaire for the grade 3s and 4s. This contained both closed and open ended questions and was very comprehensive:

1. *What do you have for a snack?*
2. *Do you eat a healthy snack?*
3. *How often would you buy a snack from the tuckshop?*
4. *If you had a healthy snack and junk food, what would you choose?*
5. *If you would buy food from the tuckshop, what would you buy?*
6. *If you had money and you had a healthy snack in your bag, which one would you rather use?*
7. *If you had junk food and money, what would you do: use the money for a healthy snack or don't use the money and eat the junk food in your lunch box?*

Due to the large number of surveys given, this group had a great deal of collating to do. Some of the group members were taking it seriously, but others, not so much. One of the group members approached me at the end of a lesson and was worried that, while collating the data, some of the group members were 'mucking around,' so he was concerned that their data would not be accurate. This made me realise that there were children in my collaborative group who were very serious and as passionate about the project as I was.

Here are the results for this group:



Upon reflection on these results, it appears that the children in the 3/4 area make relatively healthy food choices for their snacks, or perhaps what they eat appears healthy to them. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that the children participating in the survey were giving answers based on what they thought the group wanted to hear. Maybe they thought that saying they made healthy choices was the perceived 'right' answer. This is where the validity of the research data comes into consideration. Perhaps in this instance it would be best to choose a selection of the students and conduct some further research in order to get the most valid results.

Group 5 also verbally surveyed the grade 5/6 classes about their tuckshop eating habits. One child stood in front of the class and the children had to choose three foods and beverages from the tuckshop list that they most regularly consume. As each child put their hand up, another group member tallied the responses. They repeated this procedure with all three 5/6 classes.

The children in this group then classified each food into healthy and unhealthy options, again using the criteria that foods that are high in sugar and/or fat were deemed unhealthy and foods such as salads, sandwiches, vegetables and fruits were classified into the healthy category.

They displayed their results onto the following pie graph:



It is evident that most children will choose unhealthy options when purchasing food from the tuckshop. The information the group collected will also be presented to the classes involved.

The Next Step

Given the data we have collected, we must now look at the needs of the children of our school in terms of healthy eating. From the data we can see that:

1. Of the students surveyed about breakfast, a large majority of those make unhealthy choices.
2. Of the students surveyed about snacks, many are choosing the unhealthy options, however there are many students who are also choosing healthy options, like fruit.
3. Of the students surveyed about buying a snack from the tuckshop, many children choose the unhealthy options available.
4. Of the students surveyed about buying lunch from the tuckshop, a large majority choose the unhealthy options available.

We needed to create a plan of action based on our findings.

Moving Forward: Food for Thought

Based on this information, we brainstormed possible actions we could take:

- Make posters to show the goodness of healthy food and display them in classrooms around the school
- Make videos about the benefits of eating healthy food and publish them on the school intranet
- Write articles for the newsletter about healthy food

- Publish healthy snack and lunch ideas in the newsletter
- Have a healthy food snack day once a week, where children are only allowed to bring fruit or vegetables in their snack
- Write a letter to the tuckshop asking them to provide more healthy options and give the tuckshop staff ideas of what to provide
- Make a screensaver with information about healthy food
- Contact **Go For Your Life** and ask for information and posters to advertise 'sometimes food' and 'all the time food'
- Teachers should eat their lunch with their class where possible

We need to keep in mind that we want this project to have an effect and be sustainable. Do health promotions work? What can we learn from others in order to make our project a success? We know that health promotions require a whole school approach. We need to find a way to involve the whole school community in our healthy eating promotion. For example we could get families to share their healthy snack and lunch ideas, and use those to publish in the school newsletter; other families may be more likely to use the ideas if they know it comes from other families.

The challenge is now to consider what is best to do, and how we can keep the student passion for this issue going in an action phase.

The key to implementing a change, especially when dealing with people in systems and relationships, is

moving people from the current state, through the transition state and into the desired future state. Most importantly it is the way that leaders in change guide people through and handle the resistance that will most definitely arise, and actually benefit the process and enhance the desired future state.

I think the key for our action research project is to make the school community feel empowered. One beneficial aspect of our project is that one of the major stakeholders, the children, are leading the change – and this means that change is more likely to be sustained where the stakeholders are empowered.

Conclusion

We know that this is just the beginning, and our school has a long way to go to in addressing the issue of healthy eating. We can't ignore the fact that there is an issue, especially considering the choices the children make when buying from the tuckshop. In order for us to make a change to the eating habits of our students, we need to adopt whole community approaches so that the wellbeing of the students and their families is increased. Perhaps in the future our whole school community can become a health promoting school, not just in the area of healthy eating, but in other areas of health too. It has been a proven success in other schools worldwide, why not ours?

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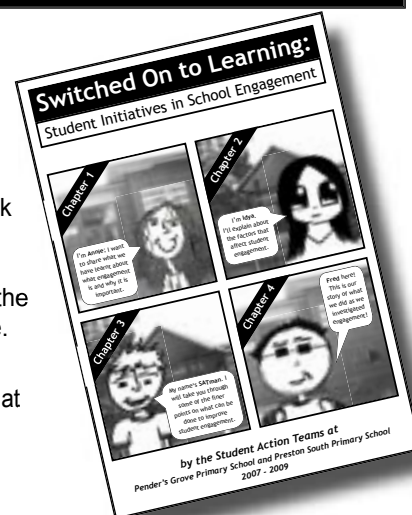
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Exploring Cyber Culture

Working in Partnership with Year 9 Students to Promote Positive Online Behaviour

The rapid emergence of a new online world has had a significant impact on the way students interact with one another. In 2009, I worked in partnership with a group of Year 9 students at Loreto Mandeville Hall (in Melbourne) to develop a more meaningful approach to the promotion of positive online behavior amongst Year 9 students and the broader school community. The proactive and enthusiastic manner in which these students engaged in the project indicated that a student-centred approach to student wellbeing is not only effective, but can serve to enhance students' sense of self-efficacy and connectedness to their school.

The evolution of the online world has brought with it the speedy rise in popularity of social networking sites. As a result, a significant portion of the wellbeing issues that are dealt with in schools have either arisen from students' online interactions, or are compounded by the nature of their online communications.

My school, like many others, has responded to these emerging issues by focusing on cyber safety as a part of its wellbeing curriculum. Many approaches involve guest speakers and a range of one-off programs and often use resources developed by such organisations as *Cyber Smart* (Australian Government, 2009) and *Think U Know* (Australian Federal Police, 2009).

It can also be observed that schools are often forced to engage in a more punitive, reactionary approach to cyber bullying and other forms of negative online behaviour. It could be argued that this approach, combined with a one-way 'dialogue' about the dangers of the online world, fails to acknowledge the positive aspects of this new social landscape. As such, it can be seen to isolate students and inhibit an open, two-way dialogue between students and adults about the online world.

The findings of the *AISV Cyber Culture Survey* also show that most negative behaviours associated with the internet and technology peak at Year 9. This survey involved 4770 students from Years 5 to 11 from 39 schools across Victoria, and the results highlighted the increasing need to explore the ways in which students engage with the online world and to 'expand age-appropriate, up-to-date educational strategies covering behavioural and safety issues.' (AISV, 2009)

As a response to this data and that which I had obtained in the role of Year 9 Coordinator at my own school, I began to promote a new *Exploring Cyber Culture* initiative amongst the students of Year 9. In the initial stages, students were invited to attend focus group sessions to contribute their insights. Early discussions with the 20 to 30 students who attended the first meetings revealed that students perceived the negative aspects of the online world to be: the addictive nature of social networking sites; the negative way people communicate with each other online ('people hide behind the computer screen') and when students post 'unflattering' photos of each other online; and

the public nature of the internet and social networking sites.

Students also reinforced the observation that they 'stop listening' to the 'lectures' about online safety and the danger of 'perverts'. Of the cyber safety programs they had participated in previously, the group acknowledged that approaches such as this were effective in encouraging students to be more cautious and aware of online dangers, but they felt that the messages they received about cyber safety were often too 'repetitive', which lead students to dismiss them.

Students also identified some of the 'positive' aspects of the cyber world as: being able to communicate with other students about homework; the ability to communicate with people overseas or interstate; the fact it is free; and that the internet as a useful research tool (when used appropriately). They emphasised their desire for parents and teachers to be educated about the way they use social networking sites so that they 'understand' it better, rather than only being warned about the dangers that students faced.

Whilst my original intention for the *Exploring Cyber Culture* project was to involve students in the research stages and then to develop a wellbeing program in response to this, my reflections on the level of student interest in the initial meetings led me to revise the primary focus of the project. As is cited by Cohen *et al*, "those experiencing the issue should be involved in decision-making". (2007, pg. 301) In the early

stages of this project it became clear that promoting student voice, as well as engaging students as agents of change, were outcomes just as meaningful as promoting positive online behavior.

Cohen *et al* also cite Morrison's assertion that, "for action research to be successful, the conditions of collegiality have to be present". These conditions include the development of subgroups which are accountable to the whole group and shared ownership of decisions and practices. (2007, pg. 311)

As a result of my emerging interest to involve them more actively and meaningfully, students chose to be involved in one (or more) of the following sub groups:

1. **Student Public Relations:** responsible for liaising with students in the year level and creating an official Year 9 Facebook Fan Page.
2. **Staff Public Relations:** responsible for liaising with staff and exploring ways to promote positive online behavior amongst staff.
3. **Research and Development Group:** responsible for contributing to the development of an online survey and subsequent pastoral program.
4. **Parent Education Group:** responsible for educating parents about cyber culture and the online world.

These new groups enabled students to take more ownership over their area of 'expertise' and created an environment more conducive to nurturing student voice.

After a number of focus group meetings, the students of Year 9 participated in an on-line survey which had

been developed by their peers. The results of this survey served to support many of the observations which had been made by students in the initial meetings:

- When asked what their definition of 'cyber bullying' was, the common definitions involved an individual or a group behaving in an insulting, hurtful or negative manner online.
- Many students identified the posting of 'unflattering' photos (or videos) without their permission as a form of bullying.
- One student indicated that they thought cyber bullying was **"Anything that is on the internet about you that you don't want even if it is meant as a joke."**

According to these definitions, approximately half the year level had experienced cyber bullying to some degree. These results were similar to those of the AISV survey, which found that, whilst the number of students who admitted to experiencing some form of negative online behaviour was in no way as 'epidemic' in proportion as the media portrays, the figures were still a 'cause for concern' and 'should be addressed in educational policy and educational materials'. (AISV, 2009)

When asked what the positive and negative aspects of social networking sites and the internet were, students reinforced the data obtained in the focus group meetings. Moreover, the themes that emerged when they were asked about what aspects of cyber culture should be addressed at school included: the way people treat each other online; online privacy; uploading photos of others; and the addictive nature of social networking sites.

The results of the survey, conversations with the subgroups and my own observations pertaining to the success of proactive student involvement, indicated that any pastoral program which was to be developed is a part of the **Exploring Cyber Culture** initiative should emphasise this notion of **student voice** amongst the entire year level. Therefore, the subsequent pastoral program gave students the opportunity to review and discuss the data obtained in the survey during pastoral time. Once they had done this, they were engaged as advocates for positive online behavior by giving them the option of creating posters to be displayed around the school, a film to be shown at an assembly for Years 7 to 9, a proposal for the Staff PR and Parent Education groups, or a list of questions for a staff online survey.

Throughout the 2009 school year, some of the original goals of the program were successfully achieved and some will be addressed throughout 2010 and beyond. The success of the online survey and subsequent pastoral program has demonstrated that shaping a wellbeing program to suit the

specific experience of the students at whom it is aimed is more successful than taking a 'one size fits all approach' to such topics as cyber safety. The **Facebook Fan Page** proved to be a positive way of embracing social networking whilst also ensuring that the online details of the students and staff who were 'fans' of the page remained private.



Finally, during Term 4, a parent education brochure was developed by the relevant sub group and it was distributed via email to the parents at the end of 2009. This brochure highlighted some of the survey results and gave parents an insight into how to ensure their daughters' use of social networking sites remained private. It is hoped that this year, a new group of Year 9s can further develop the initiative by engaging staff in the discourse about cyber culture.

Not only has the *Exploring Cyber Culture* initiative provided valuable insight into the online world and its implications for the students in my care, but I have learned a great deal about the importance of promoting **student voice** and facilitating **student action**. Being immersed in this project for a number of months has nurtured my own sense of self efficacy, as well as the relationships I have with both staff and students at the school in which I work.

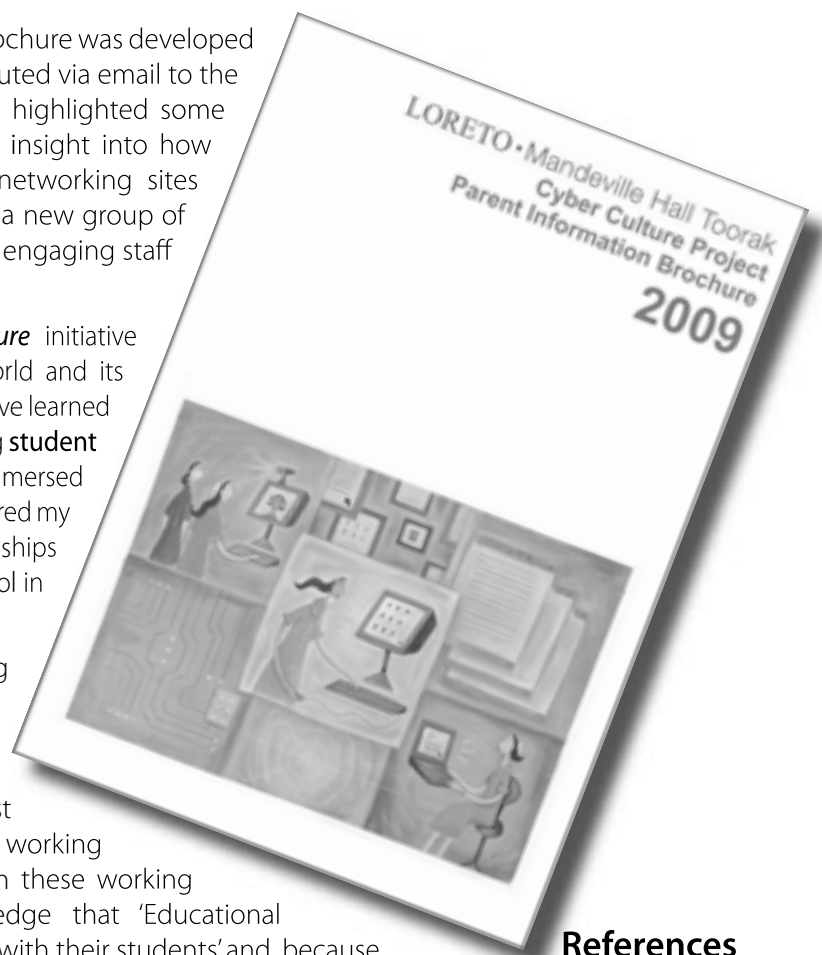
Langdon and Marshall cite trusting relationships as being integral to change. (1998, pg. 216) It is clear that, in order for a collaborative approach to change to be successful, positive relationships must be developed. Moreover, the process of working collaboratively serves to further strengthen these working relationships. Hargreaves *et al* acknowledge that 'Educational change efforts affect teachers' relationships with their students' and, because of the 'heavy emotional investments' in these relationships, 'Their sense of success and satisfaction depend on them.' (2001, pg.136) The level of student participation in the *Exploring Cyber Culture* initiative was inspiring and I have learned a great deal about what students can achieve if given the opportunity.

Whilst the opportunity for students to have a voice and to liaise with other members of the school community (staff and parents) can be seen as two of the factors which facilitated this high level of student involvement in the project, the time constraints of a busy school can be seen as a rather significant barrier to progress in this Action Research Project. In effect, perhaps the most challenging aspect of the project was negotiating a realistic timeline in a busy school and facilitating student action in the process. Working with students as collaborators, whilst an enriching experience, involved a great deal of time and energy. Marsh identifies that the process of change requires 'time, energy and resources to support it'. (2000, pg 390)

Through this project, I have learned that the passive nature of students that teachers so often despair about can be challenged. This can be accomplished firstly by nurturing the positive relationships with students that can be seen to facilitate student action. In the classroom, developing 'classroom learning partnerships' with students can be seen to promote the participation of students in their own learning. (Holdsworth, 1998, pg 8-9) Furthermore, promoting student voice and 'youth agency' school-wide has the potential to enhance the connectedness of students to their schools, as well as their sense of self efficacy. This approach is fundamental to the promotion of student wellbeing in schools.

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Improving Values in our School Community

Increasing Authentic Student Leadership through the Implementation of Student Action Teams

Leadership and decision-making are two capacities that have been identified as necessary for humans to operate in a rapidly changing world. They had also been targeted for improvement in a recent review of our primary school. Opportunities for leadership and decision-making were recognised by teachers and parents as limited and 'at times' tokenistic. Further information gathered on this issue from Year 5/6 students also supported the need for improvement.

Also at this time, the school was invited to be part of a Values Education Project, exploring and implementing best practice Values Education Pedagogy. In response to the school-based need and our involvement in the project, the School Leadership Team supported the implementation of Student Action Teams (SATs) within a values context at the Year 5/6 level as an approach to both improve opportunities for authentic student leadership and decision-making, and Values Education. Student Action Teams have been identified through the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project, Stage 2 (2008) as an effective strategy to promote student leadership and authentic voice in decision-making.

A whole school approach was adopted, and all staff were provided with professional learning through Roger Holdsworth and professional reading. One hundred and thirty four Year 5/6 students and seven classroom teachers worked collaboratively with Roger and myself to plan, implement and evaluate the SAT action research.

Background

The onset of the twenty-first century has seen a shift in educational curriculum from one that has been primarily 'outcomes driven', as



seen in the Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF) to a curriculum that emphasises the role of students in taking increasing responsibility for their learning, their physical, personal and social wellbeing, their relationships with others, and the local, national and global community (Suggett, as cited in Manefield, Collins, Moore, Maher, and Warne, 2007, p. 1). Schools are challenged to develop curriculum that provides opportunities for students to be able to participate and express their views and be heard, as highlighted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (as cited in Manefield *et al.*, 2007). Holdsworth (as cited in Kate Gross, 2006) believes that students have the skills, expertise and knowledge to make important decisions and, when they are provided with these opportunities, engagement, learning outcomes and wellbeing

are promoted. Our challenge was to provide those opportunities and make them authentic and purposeful.

Goals

With the long-term goals of improving authentic student leadership, student voice in decision-making and Values Education clearly identified, the following short-term goals were developed:

- Student leadership opportunities will increase through the introduction of Student Action Teams;
- Authentic student voice in decision-making about school issues important to students will be promoted through the implementation of Student Action Teams; and
- Values Education will improve as a result of Values-focused Student Action Teams.

Called To Action

Phase 1: School-level Preparation

A core team was established to drive the project. This consisted of the seven Year 5/6 teachers and myself who worked collaboratively with Roger Holdsworth and Sue Cahill (St Charles Borromeo, Templestowe), and in consultation with Philippa Lovell (CEOM) and Professor Judith Chapman (ACU). Following the whole staff professional learning, the core team met further with Roger to map out the project in more detail, define actions that needed to occur and allocate responsibilities to team members. It was also important at this stage to identify where the SATs could

integrate into the current curriculum as we did not want this change project to be an 'add on', creating more work as it can be easy to experience overload in times of change (Fullan, 1999).

For the second part of the phase 1, I engaged the Year 5/6 students in classroom-based activities, lead by their teachers, exploring the concept of SATs and Values. Each class was divided into three SATs and the team members elected a team leader. Each team then identified five values that they believed needed improving in the school community. These were bundled with the other teams' values priorities and prioritised. The top five were noted:

Justice Patience Responsibility
Respect Honesty

SAT leaders were presented to the school community at the next assembly and received their SAT leadership badge. Two of the leaders provided a brief overview of their leadership roles and the proposed action research.

Within the following two weeks, the 15 SAT leaders attended a Student Forum facilitated by Roger Holdsworth. Class leaders presented their top five values and spoke about why their class believed they needed improvement. The final five values were selected; these were to become the focus of research and action for the SATs. Each class was allocated a value to research. Together, the SAT leaders posed major research questions about their values and then developed more specific research questions. They were introduced to some major research approaches: surveys, interviews, questionnaires, and a proposed timeline were established.

Phase 2: School-based Research

The SAT leaders informed their classes of the research approaches and possible 'big picture' questions and specific questions that could be used to gather information. Each class developed a definition for their

focus value and allocated each SAT a group to research: students, parents, and teachers. Research questions were refined and approaches for gathering data were negotiated within each team. At this point the role of the teacher was to 'scaffold the process' (VEGPSP, Stage 2, 2008), and to provide time for the SAT leaders to work with their teams, as it is important that students are allowed to lead the project (VEGPSP, Stage 1, 2006).

SAT leaders allocated tasks to their team members and teams began conducting their research over a four-week time frame. During this time, one teacher in the collaborative team and I met with the SAT leaders to provide encouragement and support and to monitor how each team was travelling with their research. Each leader was invited to share their journey so far, which provided both support and reinforcement from their peers, as well as ideas for teams that were not as far under way. I also attended two 5/6 level weekly meetings to touch base with the classroom teachers as to how the project was developing in their class and to provide support and any further information if required.

At the completion of the six weeks, most teams had not completed their research. Roger was invited back for two student forums and a briefing



with the 5/6 teachers so he could listen to our journey so far and provide critical feedback and possible direction. It appeared that the SATs were trying to collect too much information from too many sources. Research questions and approaches were refined and numbers of research participants reduced.

Research data gathered was analysed by team leaders and conclusions made. Broad statements were formed, representing students, parents and teacher responses.

The data collected reflected the following:

- All students, teachers and parents believe that Values are important in our school community;
- Teachers, parents and older students understand the concepts of Justice, Patience, Responsibility, Respect and Honesty;
- Most students, teachers and parents believe that Holy Spirit contributes to developing values but this could be continued to be improved;
- Most students, teachers and parents believe they know how to enact these values; and
- Most students, teachers and parents see values enacted at Holy Spirit.

Leaders were then challenged to think about what they would like their focus-value to be **like** in the school community – visioning. A second Student Forum was held in each classroom, facilitated by the three SAT leaders. Data and reports were presented to all team members and the students continued to explore the concept of their 'desired future state' (Beckhard, as cited in Marcus, 2000), and the vision for their value in the school community. Each team began to plan their action, brainstorming possibilities and sharing ideas.

Phase 3: School-based Action

Because the data suggested that the greatest need for improvement in values was related to the student population, with minimal concern from teachers and parents, the three SATs in each class worked together with their class as a whole to develop an overall action plan. SAT leaders then met with me to share and compare action plans. At this point we sorted which actions were realistic and achievable in the short term, and which required a longer time frame to be implemented. We wanted the short-term action to be completed within 3-4 weeks. We also negotiated the action that was designated to particular classes so that five different SAT teams were not going into the same class as we wanted an even spread across the school community. Leaders then returned to their classes, presented their revised action plans and allocated tasks to team members. Action commenced.

SAT ideas to improve Values in the school community were:

- Posters reflecting the five focus Values with thought/question bubbles attached – displayed in office foyer;
- Create Values certificates to be presented at assembly;
- Present role-plays at assembly and/or to classes to model values; and
- Create items for the newsletter: values definitions, research findings, description of actions.

Observations and Outcomes

The action research model has provided both teachers and students with a structure and process that allows us to gather information from our school community that has not been done before.

The implementation of Student Action Teams has empowered our Year 5/6 students to be leaders and make decisions in our school community within the context of Values Education. The action research approach within the SAT model provided opportunities for the students and teachers to work collaboratively to address the identified needs, giving them a sense of agency.

The 5/6 teachers and students provided evaluative feedback along the journey through focus groups, observations and PMIs. Results of this evaluation strongly suggested that SATs were an effective strategy for increasing opportunities for student leadership, not just for the SAT leaders but for all Year 5/6 students involved, for improving student voice in authentic decision-making and improving Values Education in our school community. SATs were viewed by staff and students as an effective strategy for engaging students in meaningful learning, high levels of engagement, decision-making and strengthening connections with the school community.

The SAT leaders and staff involved in the action research project made the following recommendations:

- Explore where SATs could be integrated into the current curriculum, eg Religious Education and Inquiry units, so that they did not become another 'add on' in an already crowded curriculum;

- It was important for SATs to be part of the regular classroom program, supported by the classroom teacher; consider having participation in SATs voluntary and establishing teams on a needs basis across the year;
- Stagger SATs across the year and keep them within a time frame (eg one term) so they are focused and explicit.

Also, we need to consider the advice provided by McNiff (as cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2007): stay small, stay focused; be realistic with what you can do; set a realistic time scale and involve others (as participants, critical friends, potential researchers).

As a result of this project, the SRC has adopted the SAT model, and the School Improvement Team is exploring how Student Action Teams can be effectively integrated into the current curriculum. These actions will promote the sustainability of this approach in our school.

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Switched On to Learning is a new resource for teachers and others, written by Grade 4, 5 and 6 members of the **Student Action Teams** at **Pender's Grove** and **Preston South Primary Schools** in Melbourne.

The students from these schools have been working for three years to investigate student engagement with school. They've now written about their work and their learning in a **52-page cartoon-style book**. The book covers ideas about what engagement is, how it can be 'measured', and why it is important. Then it goes on to look at the factors that influence engagement with school and what can be done to improve student engagement. In the final chapter, the students describe their journey – and how this approach was itself an engaging one.

Switched On to Learning is an outcome of the **Student Initiatives in School Engagement (SISE)** project at these two schools, funded by a **School Engagement Grant (2007-2009)** from **The CASS Foundation Limited** (www.cassfoundation.org).

This book is essential reading for teachers, students, principals, consultants, parents and others, who want to learn how schools can become more engaging, who want to hear what experts (students from Grades 4, 5 and 6) have to say, and who want to consider how to develop their own approaches to engagement.

Students from these schools have recently 'launched' it and presented their work to their local Member of Parliament, to officers of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, to the Directors of The CASS Foundation, and to a meeting of teachers and principals from other schools. Further copies are being distributed by the schools, the Foundation and through **Connect**.

Switched On to Learning:

Student Initiatives in School Engagement

Chapter 1

I'm Annie; I want to share what we have learnt about what engagement is and why it is important.

Chapter 2

I'm Idya. I'll explain about the factors that affect student engagement.

Chapter 3

My name's SATman. I will take you through some of the finer points on what can be done to improve student engagement.

Chapter 4

Fred here! This is our story of what we did as we investigated engagement!

by the Student Action Teams at
Pender's Grove Primary School and Preston South Primary School
2007 - 2009

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With support from The CASS Foundation through the project, **Connect** is able to make a limited number of copies of this book available for \$5 (including GST, postage and handling). There is a limit of 10 copies per order. An order form for **Switched On to Learning** (and other **Connect** publications) is included on the next page. Copy this and fax or mail it to **Connect**.

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Switched On To Learning Launched

In late November 2009, members of the Student Action Teams at Preston South and Pender's Grove Primary Schools launched their publication '**Switched On To Learning**'. They firstly visited the offices of their local State Member of Parliament (Fiona Richardson), where they presented Fiona with copies of their book and talked about the process. Fiona later congratulated the students in Parliament and noted the importance of their work.

The students then traveled to the city offices of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, where they met with a large group of interested Department personnel and also presented them with copies of their book.

This document is both a report of the three-year project – but also a resource for teachers and students: **listening to student voices about engagement!**

ASPRINworld: the *Connect* website!

<http://www.asprinworld.com/Connect>

Connect has a website (address above).

ASPRIN is the *Australian Student Participation Resource and Information Network* ("a cure for your student participation headaches") – a still-emerging concept. The *Connect* section of the website is slowly growing, with information about subscribing, some back issue contents and summaries of *Student Councils and Beyond*, *Student Action Teams*, *Reaching High* and *Switched On to Learning*.

Have a look!

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